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Written statement* submitted by the Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain Inc., a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[13 February 2015]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Human Rights Abuses in the Kingdom of Bahrain

On the occasion of the 28th session of the Human Rights Council, Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain, the Bahrain Center for Human Rights, and the Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy would like to commemorate the anniversary of the February 14 uprising in the Kingdom of Bahrain. Since the government's violent suppression of the peaceful movement, the status of human rights in Bahrain has steadily deteriorated.

Human rights abuses directly attributable to the government continue in the small island kingdom, and ADHRB, BIRD, and BCHR receive daily reports of fresh abuses committed by government security forces. The use of torture remains systemic, while the government continues to campaign against the freedoms of speech, opinion, and assembly by targeting peaceful dissenters and political activists for enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention, and in some cases extrajudicial killing. Recently, the government extended its use of violence to women, incarcerating 13 female political activists for their role in a peaceful call for self-determination. Additionally, since March 2011, the government has employed the use of force against child dissenters; ADHRB and BCHR have together documented over 40 cases of child political prisoners in 2014 alone.

The government has recently begun employing the death sentence against potential political dissidents. While the death sentence enjoyed a brief respite in the years following the enactment of Bahrain's national constitution, Bahraini courts have recently revived the practice. Substantial evidential concerns mar convictions resulting in death sentences, with one death row inmate claiming that government security officers tortured him in order to extract the confession that ultimately proved conclusive in his conviction. The same inmate claims that security officers told him that they were aware of his innocence, but that he deserved to die for being disloyal to the Bahraini government. To the best of our knowledge, the government has not investigated the inmate's credible allegations as required by the Convention against Torture.

Far from improving its human rights record, recent government action has only contributed to an increasingly unstable situation. In December 2014, the Government of Bahrain arrested Shaikh Ali Salman, the leader of the peaceful Bahraini opposition party al-Wefaq. The government accused Shaikh Salman of miscellaneous crimes relating to his internationally-guaranteed right to the freedom of expression. His incarceration has contributed to a growing sense of frustration and desperation amongst the Bahraini people.

However, Shaikh Salman is neither the first nor the last person punished by the Government of Bahrain for voicing his dissent. In February, Sayed Ahmed al-Wadaei, the Director of Advocacy of the Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy in London, joined a host of other peaceful political activists rendered stateless by the Government of Bahrain as punishment for their dissent. The list additionally includes Husain Abdulla, the Executive Director of Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain, who was stripped of his citizenship by the government in 2012. Since then, the government has made a policy of denaturalizing its most vocal dissenters, thereby violating international peremptory norms concerning statelessness.

The Government of Bahrain has additionally chosen to retaliate against citizens voicing their dissent at the Human Rights Council. In October 2014, government security forces arrested Nabeel Rajab after he returned from an advocacy tour including participation in the 27th Session of the Council. The government charged Rajab with denigrating government institutions in relation to tweets that he published while abroad. In January, a Bahraini court convicted him on these charges, sentencing him to six months in prison. His appeal remains ongoing.

The government has attempted to obfuscate its downward human rights trajectory by creating government institutions ostensibly tasked with implementing reform. In late 2013, the Government of Bahrain created the Office of the Ombudsman of the Ministry of Interior, and in mid-2014 renewed and amended the mandate for a previously-existing National Institute of Human Rights. However, these institutions have thus far been ineffective in establishing implementation of human rights norms. Torture and arbitrary detention continue in Bahrain's prisons, while security forces continue to disappear political activists. Additionally, neither institution maintains significant independence from

the government, as both organizations are still staffed by the king. Further, many persons within the organization, including the Secretary-General of the Ombudsman, have previously worked for the Ministry of Interior and Office of the Public Prosecution.

In attempting to engage with both institutions, ADHRB found that the Office of the Ombudsman disingenuously engages its complaint process, closing investigations of allegations of enforced disappearance when a victim appears without actually investigating the circumstances that led to the disappearance in the first place. The Ombudsman additionally often ignores or otherwise fails to investigate allegations of torture and arbitrary detention. Additionally, while the National Institute of Human Rights published a welcome report in late 2014, its failure to gain accreditation under the Paris Principles underscores its inability to affect real change in the country.

The international community has largely taken note of Bahrain's regression on the subject of human rights. At the 26th Session of the Human Rights Council, 47 states signed a joint statement holding Bahrain to task for its human rights record. This statement, the fourth of its kind issued in Geneva since 2011, joined three statements from the European Union and multiple statements from UN bodies calling for Bahrain to honor its international commitments towards human rights. Additionally, UN Member States individually made 176 recommendations for the Government of Bahrain in its second-cycle of its Universal Periodic Review in 2012. Thus far, the Government of Bahrain has not substantially responded to any of these calls or recommendations.

At the 28th Session of the Human Rights Council, ADHRB, BIRD, and BCHR call upon the Member States of the United Nations to renew their calls for the promotion and respect of human rights in Bahrain. We specifically ask the international community to:

- Demand that the government of Bahrain release all political prisoners, and drop all charges and vacate any sentences relating to political action, including those of Nabeel Rajab and Shaikh Ali Salman;

- Conduct independent investigations into the systemic human rights abuses in Bahrain, including those relating to the use of torture, enforced disappearance, and arbitrary detention;

- Call on the Office of the Ombudsman of the Ministry of Interior and the Bahrain National Institute for Human Rights to fully and genuinely engage their mandates and implement human rights reform in the country; and

- Consider issuing a Human Rights Council resolution condemning Bahrain's human rights abuses at the 29th Session of the Human Rights Council.